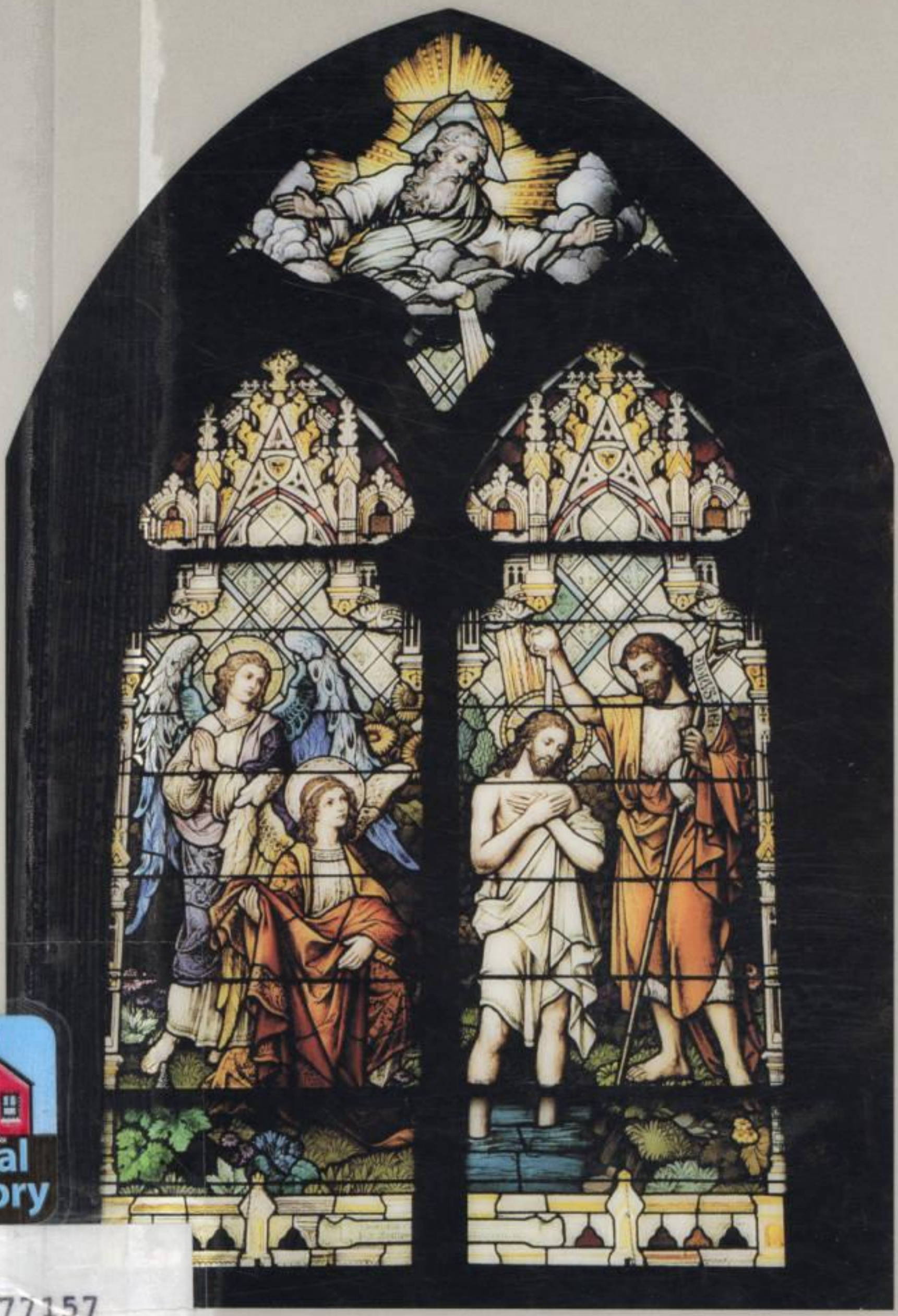

Local History

Ohio
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The Centennial History of

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST ITALIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Columbus, Ohio

September 18, 1898 – September 20, 1998

Front Cover: This beautiful stained glass window of St. John baptizing Jesus Christ in the Jordan River is prominently located in the East Broad Street wall of the bell tower chapel baptistery of St. Joseph's Cathedral. The parishioners of St. John the Baptist attended Sunday mass there at 9:00am for a period of nearly two years from October 1896 to September 18, 1898 at which time their new place of worship, St. John the Baptist Church, was solemnly dedicated.

Photo: Compliments Joe Finocchi Photography Studio

PREFACE FOR THE DEDICATION OF A CHURCH

Father, all-powerful and ever-living God,
we do well always and everywhere
to give you thanks.

We thank you now for this house of prayer
in which you bless your family
as we come to you on pilgrimage.

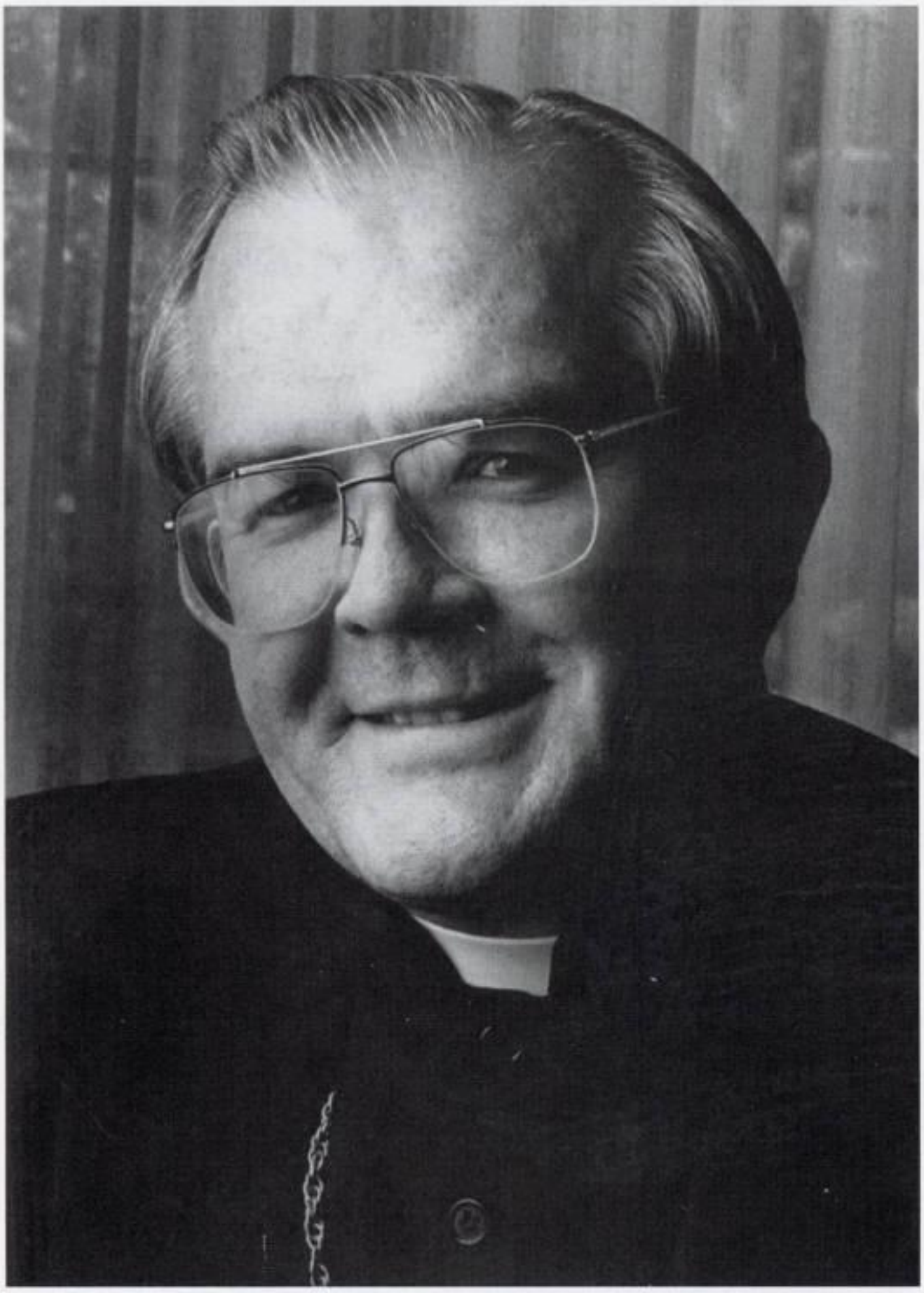
Here you reveal your presence
by sacramental signs,
and make us one with you
through the unseen bond of grace.
Here you build your temple of living stones,
and bring the Church to its full stature
as the body of Christ throughout the world,
to reach its perfection at last
in the heavenly city of Jerusalem,
which is the vision of your peace.

In communion with all the angels and saints
we bless and praise your greatness
in the temple of your glory.

"The past is prologue.

The present and future are subject to the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit."

John Cardinal Krol



The Most Reverend

James A. Griffin

Tenth Bishop of Columbus

Catholic Diocese of Columbus

Office of the Bishop
614 · 224 · 2251

September 20, 1998

Dear Parishioners and Friends of St. John the Baptist
Italian Catholic Church:

I write to greet you as you prepare to celebrate a very momentous occasion, the centennial of the dedication of your beautiful and historic church.

One of the ways in which God reveals His providence is in history. It is easy enough for any one of us to count the blessings God bestows on us in a single day, but when we look upon the richness of the blessings God gives to generations of families in a parish community from the perspective of a century, we are truly overwhelmed. We are astounded when we consider the many lives enriched by the sacraments, the lessons of faith learned, the customs and traditions passed along, the virtues instilled, the many hearts inspired by preaching and teaching, and the incalculable moments of prayer and devotion. All of these blessings accumulate over the course of one hundred years and to try to remember them all is impossible. It is a reminder of how generous our God is. The one hundred years of St. John the Baptist Church have been a continuous flood of God's graces.

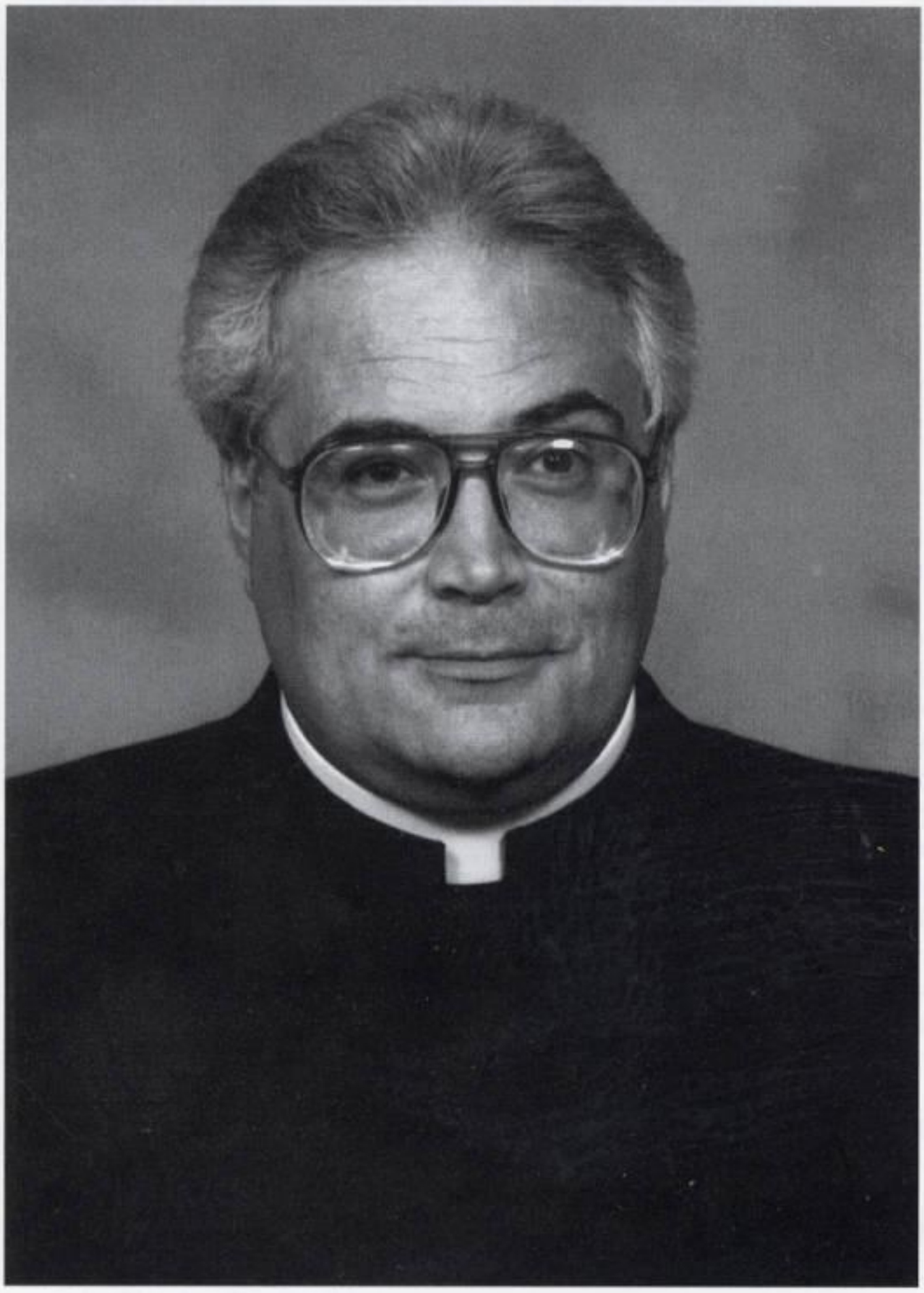
May that same grace touch each of your lives now and for many days to come.

With every best wish, I am,

Sincerely in Christ,

+James A. Griffin

+JAMES A. GRIFFIN
Bishop of Columbus



The Reverend Father

William A. Metzger

Tenth Pastor

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST CATHOLIC CHURCH AND ITALIAN CULTURAL CENTER

720 Hamlet St.
Columbus, Ohio 43215-1534
Rectory: (614) 294-5319
Cultural Center: (614) 294-3669

September 20, 1998

Carissimi Fratelli e Sorelle in Cristo,

We celebrate today a significant milestone in the history of our parish. For one hundred years, the stone and brick structure that we affectionately call St. John's, has been home to the Italian Catholic community in Columbus. Many of you and your parents, grandparents, relatives and friends for one hundred years have come to this holy place to be initiated, invigorated and consoled by the celebration of the liturgy of our Mother, the Church - the Sacrament of God's presence on this earth.

As our second reading today reminds us we are the "living stones, built as an edifice of spirit, with a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Just as our predecessors made this edifice sacred by their presence, witness and sacrifice, so we, too, are called to do the same in our day and age. The challenges may be different, but God's providence and grace is constant.

It is my hope and prayer for our parish as we begin our second century in this building, at the threshold of a new millennium,that we will continue to grow in our witness and worship of God in Spirit and Truth.

Affettuosa mente il vostro pastore,

William A. Metzger

Reverend Father William A. Metzger
"Don Guglielmo"

CHIESA ITALIANA di SAN GIOVANNI BATTISTA
ITALIAN CHURCH of SAINT JOHN the BAPTIST

720 Hamlet Street Columbus, Ohio

Parish Founded October, 1896
Cornerstone Laid May 15, 1898
Solemn Dedication September 18, 1898

BY THE HAND OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE AN ITALIAN CHURCH IS BORN

Founding pastor, Reverend Father Alexander Cestelli, D.D., was born in Fiesole, Italy and was a native of Borgo San Sepulcro diocese, which is a Suffragen See of Florence, Italy. In 1887 he obtained his excardination from his native diocese to accept a professorship at St. Paul's Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota. He was incardinated in that diocese on January 5, 1888. There he taught seven years in the minor seminary, St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary, Merriam Park and one year at the major seminary in St. Paul.

The Reverend Monsignor Joseph Jessing, founding rector of the Pontifical College Josephinum in 1888, had been in correspondence with Father Cestelli from the middle of January 1896 regarding his acquisition for the Josephinum. By January 26, 1896, his acceptance was confirmed. At the Josephinum he was engaged as a professor to teach Moral Theology. In the course of time, Father Cestelli became quite interested in the spiritual welfare of the Italian immigrants of Columbus who had no set place of worship.

In October 1896, the Right Reverend John Ambrose Watterson, D.D., Bishop of the Diocese of Columbus, appointed Father Cestelli to take charge of the Italian immigrants' spiritual needs in Columbus. Soon after Father Cestelli's appointment, he organized regular church services for his new congregation in the bell tower chapel baptistery of St. Joseph

Cathedral. For nearly two years, Sunday morning masses were celebrated in the baptistery at nine o'clock. A beautiful stained glass window of St. John baptizing Jesus is prominently located in the front wall of the chapel baptistery. After viewing this magnificent work of art, one can easily imagine how St. John the Baptist was chosen as the patron saint of this church. Additionally, the baptistery played an important role in facilitating the diverse spiritual needs of a growing Italian congregation. The first parish baptism was administered to Francesco Pietro Caito on Sunday, December 20, 1896, and the first wedding was celebrated on March 25, 1897 with the marriage of Mr. Charles Amicon and Miss Maria Bova. Also, Italian children received religious instruction in their native language in the chapel baptistery.

Before long, this small assemblage and its devoted pastor began on a very modest scale to make an effort towards acquiring their own place of worship. Their first intention was to purchase an existing building and remodel it according to their needs. Later it was found advisable to change these plans, and before the close of 1897, Father Cestelli purchased four lots on Lincoln and Hamlet Streets at a cost of $4,700 and immediately set about raising more funds for the construction of a church.

Early in January 1898, representatives of city churches held a meeting in the baptistery of the Cathedral to formulate plans for a bazaar to benefit the new church. Father Cestelli's statement that he had already purchased the lots was added incentive to the movement, and those present heartily pledged themselves to make the proposed enterprise a success. The bazaar, which was held at Columbus City Hall, opened on February 15, 1898 and continued through February 19. The Catholic Societies and members of the different congregations were liberal in their patronage, and the handsome articles on the various tables were disposed of with profit. Despite inclement weather conditions, it was a great success, netting about $2,000.

As a later contribution, Mr. John Marzetti made a

generous donation of a fine building lot in Marzetti's addition on the North Side. This lot was valued at $1,200 and was raffled off with tickets selling for $1.00 each.

With funds in hand and bright prospects of the new congregation, ground was broken for the new church early in the Spring of 1898, followed by the laying of the cornerstone with due ceremony on Sunday, May 15, 1898. Large delegations accompanied by several bands of music, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Knights of St. John, and the Italian Beneficial Society met at the corner of Broad and Third Streets and marched to the church. The Knights of St. John were attired in full uniform and were accompanied by their own band.

The Right Reverend John Ambrose Watterson, assisted by the Reverend Monsignor Joseph Jessing and Reverend Father Cestelli, officiated. Amid a profusion of American flags, floating over the white-robed forms of nearly a score of eminent clergy, more than three hundred stood with bowed heads at 3 o'clock Sunday afternoon and listened to the solemn services during the laying of the cornerstone of the new church of St. John the Baptist.

Prior to the formal placing and blessing of the cornerstone, Bishop Watterson addressed the large audience, first in English and then in Italian, relating briefly the history of the organization of the new church and paying a glowing tribute to the men and women whose earnest work and prayers had accomplished so great a result.

"The time will come," he said, "when the edifice to be raised on this spot will succumb to the hand of time and crumble back to dust, but the glorious work of the noble men and women who have raised this tribute to the Divine One will live on and on, through ages to come, and will be written in undying letters in the book of eternal life." Father Cestelli spoke briefly in both Italian and German followed by Monsignor Jessing who spoke briefly in German. The cornerstone was then filled, sealed and laid in place, while a choir from the Josephinum chanted the responses according to the rubrics.

A general description of the completed church is as follows: 43 feet wide by 104 feet long, with an exterior of buff brick accented with stone trimmings from the kilns of the Columbus Brick and Terra Cotta Co. The basement is of Columbus limestone. The slate and tin roof work was done by Zimmer Brothers. Designed by architect, D. Reibel, the general style of the church architecture is gothic with a steeple and spire 98 feet in height from the ground to apex. Upon completion the cost of the church was estimated to be $12,000.

The congregation, numbering 104 families, eagerly awaited the completion of the construction. It was originally anticipated that the church would be ready on Sunday, August 14, the eve of the Assumption, or if not then, on September 4. Unfortunately, due to unavoidable construction delays, the dedication date was rescheduled for Sunday, September 18.

On Saturday, September 17, 1898, the Most Reverend Sebastiano Martinelli, Titular Archbishop of Efeso and Apostolic Delegate to the United States, arrived in Columbus to officiate at the solemn consecration and dedication of the Italian church the next day. The distinguished visitor was accompanied by his secretary, Reverend F. Z. Rooker, D.D. They were quite warmly met at the Union Station by a large delegation of church officials and members of the Italian community. Prominent among the group were Bishop Watterson, Bishop James Trobec of St. Cloud, Minnesota, Monsignor Jessing and Father Cestelli. After greetings and introductions, the party proceeded by carriage to the residence of Bishop Watterson where they were entertained during their stay in Columbus.

On Sunday, September 18, 1898, the long awaited day of solemn and festive celebration began. The dedication celebration began with a parade of Catholic societies who formed their units at Chestnut and Fourth Streets prior to marching to the church. The parade was led by a platoon of police under the command of Sergeant Farmer, followed by the Dewey Italian Marching Band, Knights of St. John and members of the Italian Beneficial Society.

At nine o'clock the solemn ceremony of consecrating the church was performed by Archbishop Martinelli. The first service, in which only the papal delegate, bishops, priests and seminarians participated, consisted of solemn blessings of the church and altar. The ceremonies involved several journeys around and across the area to be blessed. After the conclusion of this ritual, a procession was formed by the clergy, and the exterior of the church was then blessed.

Shortly after this ceremony, the church was reopened, and the dedication continued with a pontifical High Mass, celebrated by Archbishop Martinelli. The celebrant was assisted by Reverend Rooker and other priests of the diocese. Also present in the sanctuary were Bishops Watterson and Trobec.

The musical program, with Professor Leonardo Vegaro directing some thirty members of the Cathedral choir, was perhaps one of the most elaborate ever prepared for an occasion of this kind. The music for the Pontifical High Mass was from works entitled Messe Solonelle, written by French composer, Gounod. They included the following musical compositions: Kyrie Eleison, Gloria, Credo, Parce Domine, Sanctus Bendictus, Agnus Dei, and the recessional, Te Deum (Holy God We Praise Thy Name). The choir also sang Salve Maria by composer Mercadante. The acoustics of the new church, which are said to be excellent, were not given a fair test at the dedication services because all the stained glass windows were not yet installed and muslin strips were used in place of missing windows.

Following the mass Bishop Watterson addressed the congregation in Italian and congratulated the members on the possession of such a beautiful structure. He referred to the honor of having the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Martinelli, here for the occasion of the dedication. Generally, parishes are established for specific geographical areas, but the Code of Canon Law allows parishes to be established by reason of the rite, language or nationality of the faithful. Therefore, St. John the Baptist Church, dedicated in fond memory of its patron, St. John the Baptist, was established as an Italian National parish.

Next, Archbishop Martinelli spoke in Italian, expressing his pleasure to be present. He referred to the church in relationship to the faithful and said it should be always in their minds. The old and young alike should show their fidelity to the church.

Perhaps no more joyful person in the whole congregation could be found than the pastor who had worked so tirelessly to build this new church for the Italian immigrants. Father Cestelli did not take part in the dedication exercises but remained with his congregation mingling and receiving words of congratulations from all sides. After mass, Father Cestelli hosted a dinner in the parsonage for his clerical guests of the day.

Church dedication services resumed again at four o'clock when Bishop Trobec gave the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament with seminarians from the Josephinum furnishing the music.

In the evening at St. Joseph's Cathedral, Archbishop Martinelli celebrated Solemn Pontifical Vespers. The church was filled to capacity with not only people who participated in the ceremony but also Catholics from throughout the city. An elaborate musical program was prepared by Professor Vegaro. The service closed with the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

At dinner on Monday, September 19, Bishop Watterson entertained the pastors of all the local Catholic churches and many of their assistants, giving them an opportunity to become more personally acquainted with the papal delegate. On Tuesday morning, September 20, Archbishop Martinelli and Reverend Rooker concluded their official and highly celebrated visit in Columbus.

Having built a beautiful church and a substantial rectory, Father Cestelli, a pious old man full of energy, spent several years as pastor of St. John's parish. Notwithstanding all his energy, there was still a big debt to pay, and receipts from the congregation were very small and inadequate. Father Cestelli became so discouraged that he reluctantly gave up his

work as pastor. He was invited to go to Portland, Oregon by Archbishop Christie, a close friend of his. After many years in the priesthood, it was here that Father Cestelli died in a taxicab accident on December 22, 1916. The Italian community shall always be grateful to Father Cestelli for his unselfish perseverance in providing them with a beautifully constructed church.

On March 1, 1901 the Reverend Vittorio Sovilla became the new pastor of the church. Father Sovilla worked faithfully to pay the standing debt, and in part he was successful. For the truth of this history, however, it is necessary to say that the poor priest, in winter and summer alike, was obliged to go from house to house to get the monthly offering of twenty-five cents or one dollar. The Italian people were not used to this kind of financial obligation. They never had to pay a cent in the old country for the support of the church, as the government took care of everything. For this reason there were problems, increasing all the time with a Rossinian crescendo, between the pastor and his parishioners. Father Sovilla was so discouraged that in 1913 he returned to Italy to stay.

In August 1913, the Most Reverend James Joseph Hartley, D.D., Bishop of Columbus, invited the Reverend Rocco Petrarca to become the next pastor of St. John the Baptist Church. Father Petrarca was born to wealth in Bordighera, near Genoa, Italy. He was baptized by a priest who was later canonized as St. John Bosco. At this baptism, St. John was to utter prophetically "Shall we one day make a priest of this child?" Also, as a youngster, Rocco Petrarca had served Mass for another priest, Padre Sarto, who was to later become Pope Pius X. These events were to ultimately have a strong bearing on his life.

As a student, he specialized in music at Milan and Rome and received his Masters Degree at age 18. He went on to further his education by studying medicine and received his degree from the University of Naples. During these studies he had visited Guglielmo Marconi in his laboratory in Bologna. He had his first experience of electricity when working with the voltaic battery while studying medicine.

After receiving his medical degree, Rocco Petrarca obtained a license to practice medicine. After about a year and a half of medical practice, he found that medicine was not his vocation. Deeply devoted to his religion, he went to Rome to study for the priesthood. In 1899, at the age of 24, he was ordained a priest.

In 1902 Father Petrarca asked for permission to come to America and serve the Italian immigrants. He was first assigned to parishes in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania prior to coming to Columbus in 1913.

The parish now had the special type of priest needed to provide strong spiritual leadership. He immediately gained the confidence and financial support of his flock, and in four years he not only paid off the church debt, but also spent an additional $5,000 for needed church repairs and embellishments that the congregation generously supported without any debt to the church.

Father Petrarca, a priest, physician, musician, inventor and electrician, used the spacious undercroft of the church as his mechanical and electrical workshop. When bells rang in the church tower to summon the flock to mass, they were powered by an ingenious electronic clock in the vestry room of the church that recorded the minute, hour, day, week, month and year. An admiring parishioner once said "Oh, Father, pretty soon you'll be able to sleep in bed all day and have a mechanical priest perform your pastoral duties".

The clock was only one of the products of the fertile brain of Father Petrarca. The large workshop was filled with lathes, jig-saws, motors, carborundum wheels, metal cutters, drills, switches, wires, batteries and other contraptions to accommodate his boundless creative genius.

Father Petrarca perfected the electric garage door opener which he sold for $3,000 and also invented a device which changes alternating current to direct current, a device for which the Westinghouse Company offered him $3,000. He also

had hundreds of electric wires running across the undercroft of the church which were connected to an elaborate lighting system surrounding all of the statues and the remaining part of the church. Upon his death no one could figure out the maze of electrical wiring that he installed.

With his music background from the Conservatories of Music in Milan and Rome, he could play almost any musical instrument. Also, he composed songs for special feast days, and he even composed his own funeral march.

Through his well versed medical knowledge, he would offer some basic medical advice to poor families of the parish who could not afford a doctor.

Father Petrarca was pastor from 1913 to 1948. His legendary accomplishments and spiritual leadership devoted to faith and family have been indelibly inscribed on the minds of all those he touched. Without question, the man and his legend shall always lovingly prevail in the hearts of the Italian Community.

In 1946 Father Petrarca's health began to seriously fail, and various priests of the diocese assisted him in this time of need. Dominican priests, Fathers Vollmer and Gilsman, helped him, particularly on weekends, for a couple of months. Then Father Felix J. Cleary assisted Father Patrarca from February to June 1947. Father Lawrence Corcoran was at St. John's from September 1947 to September 1948 as assistant and substitute pastor. Father Charles Curran followed from September 1948 to June 1949. By this time Father Petrarca was permanently disabled and confined to St. Joseph Home in Dearborn, Michigan where he died on February 12, 1952. A Pontifical Requiem Mass was celebrated in St. John the Baptist Church by The Most Reverend Bishop Michael J. Ready, D.D., Bishop of Columbus. Burial was in St. Joseph Cemetery. On July 27, 1975, a special mass and ceremony was held in his honor by the parishioners. A fitting commemorative bronze bust of Father Rocco Petrarca stands in front of the church rectory in fond memory of his extraordinary love and contributions to humankind.

After Father Petrarca's retirement, the spiritual care of this parish was entrusted to the PIME Fathers (Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions) who have served the Italian community and the Columbus Diocese with excellence. The first pastor was Father Charles Sala, PIME, and his assistant was Father Casto Marrapese, PIME. Father Sala served as pastor from June 1949 through 1955. The church at this time was in very bad structural condition. Father Sala immediately set into motion much needed structural and remodeling priorities. Since no electrical engineer could figure out the complex electrical network of Father Petrarca, the new pastor decided to have it all removed and install a completely new electrical system. The undercroft of the church was to have a side door entrance, cement floor, new kitchen and two lavatories to facilitate future parish religious meetings and fund raising events of spaghetti dinners and bingo. It was also necessary to do some remodeling in the church and build an addition to the rectory.

Nick Cenci and his son Pete generously spearheaded these major construction projects under the direction of Father Sala and the able and generous assistance of members of the parish. The Cencis created a side entrance to the church undercroft and hauled away five dump truck loads of workshop machinery and electrical wires installed by Father Petrarca. With fine workmanship, the project was satisfactorily completed as planned, and a new era under the capable administration of PIME priests had shown the fruits of their hard labor.

Additionally, Father Sala was also confronted with another structural challenge when he was informed by building inspectors that the church's steeple was in a dangerous state of disrepair. However, restoration cost of this project was too prohibitive, and Father Sala regrettably had no other choice but to have the Pagura Construction Company remove the steeple.

Father Sala was succeeded by Father Antimo Boerio, PIME, who had been a missionary priest in China. Father Boerio was pastor for two years, 1956 and 1957, when he was

called to Rome to be an assistant at the Society's General Council. Father Charles Sala returned to St. John's as pastor for another distinguished four years of devoted service to his beloved Italian community. From September 1961 to June 1963 the pastor was Father Ovidio Calzini, PIME, a missionary from Hong Kong. From June 1963 through April 21, 1974, Father Ettore Bellinato, PIME, a missionary from India, served St. John as their new and energetic pastor. The church, at this time, was crowded with statues representing a particular section of the Italian immigrants hometown. In earlier times, each of these saints was feasted very solemnly with marching bands, processions and a Solemn High Mass. During his tenure Father Sala had some of these statues removed, some replaced, and some relocated in different parts of the church.

With the renewal of the liturgy and a sanctuary too small for two altars, one for the tabernacle and a frontal altar facing the congregation for the celebration of mass, it was decided to remove the old structure completely. The apse was lined with five closets surmounted by five niches, each containing one statue. The remaining statues were relocated in between the Stations of the Cross. Contrary to Father Bellinato's concern about these dramatic changes, none of the parishioners objected; in fact, they rather liked the new ecumenical arrangement.

Father Bellinato was also responsible for replacing a time-worn church organ with a beautiful new Ruffati organ imported from Padua, Italy. Additionally, the original steps of the church, very difficult to climb, were changed to facilitate easier accessibility for the older parishioners. At the same time, the pastor added a front access to the church's undercroft. Father Bellinato retired on April 21, 1974 because of ill health and returned to Italy where he died. A memorial mass was held at St. John the Baptist Church on Saturday, October 12, 1974.

The last PIME priest to serve as pastor of St. John the Baptist Church was Father Casto Marrapese, who served his flock from April 22, 1974 to July 1, 1991. Father Marrapese was

assigned as assistant pastor to Father Sala. Father Marrapese was no stranger to Columbus prior to his appointment as pastor. He came to America in 1949 and was assigned to the U.S. regional PIME house in Detroit, Michigan. His mission was to assist in founding PIME seminaries in North America.

In 1953, through his energetic and invaluable assistance, the first PIME seminary in America was opened on East North Broadway Avenue in Columbus. During 1953 Father Marrapese also organized the St. Peter and Paul Missionary Guilds which have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the spiritual benefit of the PIME order throughout the world.

In September 1954 Father Marrapese was reassigned to the New York area to build a second PIME seminary. Through his tireless efforts construction of a new seminary was successfully completed in 1962 in Oakland, New Jersey. Father returned to St. John the Baptist in 1967 as assistant pastor and was appointed pastor in 1974.

Because of his spirited love for the Italian community and the high esteem in which they held him, church attendance dramatically increased. Many of these 'new' parishioners were the children and grandchildren of those original families who worked so hard to build this beautiful Italian church many years ago. In anticipation of the future needs of the parish, Father Marrapese purchased the vacated convent of the Dominican Sisters of the Sick Poor located adjacent to the church in hopes of building The Italian Cultural Center.

In 1980 Father Marrapese founded the Italian Festival with three objectives: 1) to bring about a public awareness of the Italian culture, 2) to sponsor college scholarships for area high school students, and 3) to raise funds for construction of the Italian Cultural Center. The fruits of his extraordinary stewardship have become realities. Father Marrapese established a $250,000 college endowment fund, built the Italian Cultural Center in October 1989, and stimulated a public awareness of the Italian culture.

In July 1991, Father Marrapese retired and presently resides at the PIME seminary in Newark, Ohio where he continues his missionary work.

On September 13, 1996, Father Marrapese was selected by Monsignor Mario A. Serraglio as the keynote speaker at a centennial banquet celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of St. John the Baptist Parish. This honor and the warm reception he was accorded from his countless friends in attendance speaks for itself.

In July 1991, Monsignor Mario A. Serraglio, an Italian-born Columbus priest, was entrusted to carry the spiritual torch of serving the needs of the Italian parish. Under Monsignor Serraglio's guidance, many facets of the Italian culture have been fostered, for example, Italian classes for children and adults, religious lectures and retreats, and cultural events featuring instrumental and vocal concerts by local artists and talent from Italy. The Italian Cultural Library has steadily grown in volumes of books, specializing in information about Italy and Italians. The Amici D'Oro and I Giovani, Italian social organizations for the seniors and the young, were founded. There is a monthly Senior Citizens Mass and Luncheon held for the elderly in the Marrapese Hall.

Monsignor Serraglio stimulated a greater participation of parishioners in activities involving various functions of the church, such as, the Advisory Board of St. John the Baptist, Pastoral Parish Council Committee, Le Donne Italiane Women's Society, and the Parish Vicariate Committee. Monsignor has recruited both men and women as Eucharistic Ministers and Lectors. Under the patronage of Monsignor Serraglio, St. John's Church Choir has grown both in size and musical proficiency. Also, the Coro Italiano singing group has risen to new heights in the quality of their singing. Other projects of note are the outside illumination of the church, and the lights added in the sanctuary and choir area. Existing stained glass windows located behind the church choir loft facing Lincoln Street were renovated.

Monsignor Serraglio also served as General Chairman of the Parish Founding Celebration which accomplished many worthy projects involving the parish and community alike. More notable projects include underwriting the building cost of a church in Mexico and establishment of a generous endowment fund in The Foundation of the Catholic Diocese of Columbus.

On Sunday, October 6, 1996, the Most Reverend James Griffin, J.D., J.C.L, Bishop of Columbus, was the principal celebrant and homilist for the 10:00am Centennial Founding Mass. The mass was concelebrated with Monsignor Mario A. Serraglio, Pastor, former pastors and priests of the diocese, along with Deacon Reverend Mr. Larry Koebel.

The program, additionally, included entertainment furnished by the Luciano Tiberi Italian Marching Band. St. John's Church Choir, the Coro Italiano, and the St. John's Italian Youth Singers, all joined voices, a capella, to sing Mira il tuo Popolo (Lord, Look at Your People).

At 10:00 am Bishop Griffin unveiled and blessed a beautiful commemorative bronze plaque that features an exact likeness of the church from an original photo of the church as it appeared when it was completed in September 1898. Immediately following the mass, light refreshments were served in the Marrapese and Sala Halls by the ladies of the parish who had prepared many favorite Italian baked goods for this historic occasion.

On July 14, 1998 Monsignor Mario A. Serraglio ended his distinguished seven year tenure as pastor of St. John the Baptist Church with his reassignment as pastor to St. Agnes Church, Columbus. Fittingly, on June 28, 1998, the parishioners of St. John the Baptist Church paid a deserved tribute to their beloved pastor, Monsignor Mario A. Serraglio, at the Berwick Party House with over 300 people in attendance.

The new spiritual leader and pastor of St. John the Baptist Church is the Reverend Father William A. Metzger who, incidentally, was the former pastor of St. Agnes Church,

Columbus. Upon the appointment of Reverend William A. Metzger as St. John the Baptist's new pastor and spiritual leader on July 14, 1998, a historical first occurred for the church. Since the founding of St. John's parish in October, 1896, nearly 102 years ago, Father Metzger is the first permanent pastor to be appointed by the Bishop of Columbus who was not born in Italy.

From the standpoint of his ancestry, the affable Father Metzger is quite proud of his Italian grandparents, Antonio and Amalia Ortenzo, of Giulianova Teramo, Abruzzi. Father speaks Italian and loves all things Italian. Father Metzger is the son of Mrs. Rita Metzger of Dennison, Ohio. He attended Dennison Immaculate Conception grade school and graduated in 1967 from St. Francis Preparatory School Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio.

He attended Duns Scotus College in Southfield, Michigan, and received a bachelor of arts degree from Kent State University in 1972. In the fall of 1974, Father Metzger began his theological studies at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Father Metzger was ordained a priest of the diocese of Columbus on May 27, 1978 and has served on the Diocesan Liturgical Commission and the Marriage Tribunal as a Defender of the Bond. Father Metzger presently serves as an associate judge on the Diocesan Marriage Tribunal and as Catholic Chaplain for Columbus Children's Hospital.

One of Father Metzgers' most memorable experiences as a priest was the honor of concelebrating a Mass with Pope John Paul II, along with several other priests, in the Pope's private chapel.

The parishioners of St. John's warmly received their new "Padre" with a surprise reception in his honor after a recent Sunday Mass.

In special commemoration of the centennial Pontifical High Mass and dedication of St. John the Baptist Church that

was celebrated on Sunday, September 18, 1898, The Most Reverend James A. Griffin, J.D., J.C.L., Bishop of Columbus, was principal celebrant and homilist for the 10:00am Pontifical Mass on Sunday, September 20, 1998.

Concelebrating clergy included the Reverend Father William A. Metzger, Pastor; and former pastors, Reverend Monsignor Mario A. Serraglio and Reverend Father Casto Marrapese, PIME, Reverend Father Robert E. Willmann, J.C.L., Vice-Chancellor of the Columbus Diocese, who served as the Master of Ceremonies, assisted by Deacon Felix Azzola.

Prior to the beginning of the Pontifical Mass, the parishioners gathered in front of the church to enjoy a musical salute in commemoration of the centennial celebration. Maestro Luciano Tiberi conducted his Italian Marching Band in this fitting tribute. At 9:50am Maestro Tiberi and his band, along with parishioners, dignitaries and flag carrying parade leaders, marched around an area bounded by Lincoln St., North Fourth St., Warren St. and Hamlet St. A procession of clerics led by Bishop Griffin joined the entourage of marchers as they approached the rectory and then continued their journey into the church.

Those in attendance for this historic celebration of the mass enjoyed the music rendered by the highly capable St. John's Choir under the musical direction of Gilda Savko and assisted by organist Karen Vaughan. Some of the music that was originally sung a century ago during the very first mass in the church, was included in the choir's musical program.

Upon the conclusion of the Pontifical Mass, Virginia Colarossi and Carmela Ristucci coordinated a light refreshment reception in the Father Marrapese Hall with freshly made Italian pastries made by the ladies of the parish. Maestro Tiberi and his band provided musical entertainment during the reception.

On Sunday, August 30, 1998, immediately after the 10:00am mass, Father Metzger announced the names of the

Centennial Celebration committee as follows:

General Chairwoman	*Helen Jaconetti*
Choir Musical Director	*Gilda Savko*
Organist	*Karen Vaughan*

The Sts. Peter & Paul Guilds coordinated the table linens and silver, borrowed from the parishioners, for the church reception. The Guilds also coordinated the offering of chrysanthemums by the parishioners. These mums were planted around the church and Italian Cultural Center in memory of their deceased loved ones.

Mum Planting	*Antonio & Donato D'Alberto & I Giovani, a young people's Christian group.*
Reception	*Virginia Colarossi, Carmela Ristucci & Committee*
Decorations	*Antoinette Gillespie*
Caffe Espresso	*Bianca Milano & Le Donne Italiane Women's Society*
Pastries	*Joanne Merendo & Advisory Board of The Italian Cultural Center*
Church Preparation	*Monica Ventresca & The Blessed Mother Sodality*
Gift Bearers	*Grace Pishitelli & The Children of the Parish with Bianca Milano*
Altar Servers	*Jason Ulbrich, Coordinator*
Ushers	*Louis Viol, Coordinator*
Lectors	*Frank Oliverio, Coordinator*
Eucharistic Ministers	*Dante Asmo, Coordinator*
Parade Marshal	*Pat Rossetti*

Parade participants were as follows: Flag Bearers, Nick Savko,

Giuseppe Tiberi and Dan Ristucci, The Knights of Columbus, The Knights of St. John, The Ancient Order of Hibernians, The Luciano Tiberi Italian Marching Band and members of the parish. A procession into the church, led by the Most Reverend Bishop James A. Griffin, J.D., J.C.L., and concelebrating clergy, joined the parade as they approached the parish rectory.

History of St. John the Baptist Church Book and
Centennial Mass Program *Joseph Pishitelli*

Having recently become pastor of St. John's, Father Metzger was overwhelmed by the outstanding cooperation and enthusiasm of the parishioners to assist in the thanksgiving of this historic milestone.

Finally, as a new century of St. John the Baptist Church history begins, as anticipated, the church and the adjoining Italian Cultural Center Conference room, were filled to capacity for this historic Solemn Pontifical Mass.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The Catholic Columbian Newspaper, Ohio Dominican College, Spangler Library
The Catholic Times
Diocese of Columbus, History of Fifty Years 1868-1918
The Catholic Record Society
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The Josephinum Catalog,
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As St. John the Baptist Italian Catholic Church embarks on the celebration of a new century, I am very pleased to join all the parishioners, clergy and others throughout our community, in praising the grace of God which has supported the tireless service of our priests and parishioners, past and present, in making a valued contribution to its prosperity. We, the beneficiaries of their devoted service, now pray for them with admiration, gratitude and great love.

Joe Pishitelli, Parishioner
St. John the Baptist Italian Catholic Church

This photo is of St. John the Baptist Church as it appeared on its completion in 1898.

Photo: Compliments Lenore Amicon Kennedy